Leading a Virtual Team

Working on a virtual team can be both exciting and challenging. The way a team interacts, collaborates, and problem solves while in the office is different when working remotely. Incorporate these principles to build an engaged and effective virtual team.

1. Build and Maintain Relationships
   Face-to-face communication is essential to build relationships and foster trust among team members. When in-person interaction is not possible build in virtual connection:
   - Make time for virtual team-building and allow time for members to connect with one another- **personally & professionally**
   - Create a virtual break room that allows team members to have informal interactions (exp. start meetings with an “icebreaker” question check-in, create a TEAMS channel share information and updates, etc.)
   - Turn on the camera to maintain connection between team members, gain contextual clues, and gauge engagement. While this can be difficult while working from home it can be helpful to view nonverbal cues and gauge engagement. Lead by example and encourage employees to do so when they can.

2. Clarify Tasks and Processes
   Coordinating work can be challenging in a virtual environment. It’s important for leaders to provide clarity about the work processes, deliverables, and ownership. While clarity is critical it is also important not to fall into the “micro-management trap” which can be demotivating and lead to a disengaged team.
   - Focus on the details of task design and the processes used to complete the work at hand
   - Simplify work as much as possible so tasks can be assigned to sub-groups
   - Clarify, specify, and track- Clarify processes and expectations, specify who is responsible, and track progress. Avoid “micro-managing” and demotivating your team by involving them in the process.
   - Revisit as needed to identify process adjustments and training needs

3. Foster Shared Leadership
   Providing clarity around tasks and process provides a “push” to keep your team productive. Fostering shared leadership creates a “pull” and can increase team engagement while providing development opportunities.
   - **Involve others in leading the team** by identify opportunities for other to lead such as leading virtual team building; mentoring new hires; sharing best practices; rotating team meeting leaders; etc.

Adapted from “Making Virtual Teams Work: 10 Basic Principles”. Watson, Michael D. Harvard Business Review
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4. Commit to Communicate
Virtual communication tends to be less frequent and susceptible to misunderstanding. To navigate these challenges, it is important to be clear and disciplined about how the team will communicate.

- Create shared vision and guiding principles for how the team will work in a virtual environment
- Be specific about how and when team will communicate
- As a team, establish norms of behavior for virtual meetings (i.e. mute when not speaking, limit side conversations, listen attentively, turn on camera if available, etc.)
- Provide guidance on what type of communication should be used when (i.e. when to send a TEAMS message vs. email vs. call a colleague). This guidance can minimize ambiguity and frustration and increase team effectiveness.

What are you currently doing to ensure your team is communicating effectively? Have you provided clear guidance on how your team should communicate? What can you try in the next 30 days? Who can help?

5. Embrace Technology
Technology allows us to work virtually but it can become a barrier if it is not reliable or doesn’t support the type of work your team does.

- Select the GT approved technology that is both easy to use and offers the features your team needs (i.e. file sharing, breakout rooms, etc.)
- Ensure all team members use the same technology
- Identify training opportunities for team members to leverage technology effectively

Is your team using collaboration technology effectively? What can you try in the next 30 days? Who can help?

6. Rhythm (no blues)
When team members are working separately in different locations it is easy to become disconnected from rhythms of work life. To combat this challenge:

- Schedule regular team meetings and 1:1s with direct reports.
- Share agenda in advance
- Clarify meeting communication protocols (i.e. submit questions via chat vs. unmute to ask questions)
- Start/Stop on time
- Rotate meeting times to equitably spread “burden” based on time zones, school schedules, etc.

What are you currently doing to create a regular “rhythm” for your team? What can you try in the next 30 days? Who can help?

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